You Can Have My Goggles When You Pry Them From My Cold Dead Fingers

By Capt. Andreas Hau, USMC

"Some Things Don't Look Better Through Goggles," an article by Ltjg. C. J. Warren, in the May 2002 issue of *Approach* discussed several problems with using NVGs. As an NVG instructor pilot at the AH-1W FRS, I say that almost everything looks better on goggles. I want to dispel any negative myths about using NVGs. I do agree with Ltjg. Warren's statement, "Take the time to think of how you would handle an emergency while wearing goggles." Let me share my views on NVGs and their value.

As an ASO, I feel night-vision goggles are one of the greatest safety devices we have introduced into naval aviation. Certain communities have not gained enough experience to believe in them and to fully understand how goggles, if used within their design parameters, increase situational awareness and safety. Besides increasing mission effectiveness, goggles improve takeoffs and landings, especially at the boat. You can execute precautionary emergency landings with more confidence.

Let's face it, the human eye has a nighttime visual acuity of 20/200 to 20/400, and NVGs have a visual acuity of 20/40 (ANVIS-6) and 20/25 (ANVIS-9). Which would you rather have? Goggles do have some limitations, such as a 40-degree field of view, monochromatic display, and a two-dimensional image, but, when compared to the unaided human eye, NVGs are the clear winner, especially over water.

Several items Ltjg. Warren discussed should be revisited:

• All crew members should be goggled from takeoff to landing. Why would you be ungoggled during the most dangerous parts of your flight?

• Keep goggle adjustments to a minimum. Find your optimum goggle settings before takeoff. It's OK to refocus as the illumination levels change, but your basic setup—inter-pupilary distance, eye relief and mount height—should remain optimized and unchanged. If you need to make an adjustment or degoggle, tell your crew and pass the controls to the other pilot. If your goggles fail, immediately pass the controls.

• On an approach, both pilots should be goggled, with the PAC scanning the gauges under his goggles. The PNAC should be backing up the pilot on the gauges and looking for the intended point of landing. If your goggles are setup correctly, you can accomplish these tasks without making adjustments.

• Why would you degoggle during an emergency? On a high-illumination night, (e.g., the case on Warren's flight), goggles turn night into an almost VFR situation. Degoggling instantly puts you into an IFR situation. Last time I checked, it always was easier to handle an emergency procedure in VFR, rather than in IFR.

• NVGs increase situational awareness during emergencies.

• Like Ltjg. Warren said, brief how you will handle EPs on the goggles. Bottom line: Stay goggled.

If you are not comfortable on goggles, here are some suggestions. Read the MAWTS-1 NVD Manual. Visit your local night lab and fly the simulator with goggles. It does take a few hours of flight time to figure out how you like your NVGs setup and what works best for you. Fifteen years ago, everyone was scoffing at computers, and now the Navy and Marine Corps can't do a thing without them. This same paradigm shift needs to happen with goggles. I think it has happened in the Marine Corps and the Army. To paraphrase what John Wayne said in the movie "Sands of Iwo Jima," "Life is tough, but it's tougher if you're not goggled."

Capt. Hau flies with HMT-303.